



United States Military Academy Band
West Point, New York 10996



U.S. Military Academy Band Heritage

The United States Military Academy Band, the U.S. Army's oldest active band and the oldest unit at West Point, traces its roots to the Revolutionary War. At that time, fifers and drummers were stationed with companies of minutemen on Constitution Island, across the river from West Point. In 1778, General Samuel Holden Parsons' 1st Connecticut Brigade crossed the Hudson River and established West Point as a permanent military post. After the American Revolution, Congress disbanded most of the Continental Army, but "the 55 men at West Point," members of the 2nd Continental Artillery, remained. Among their ranks stood at least one drummer and one fifer, who alone maintained the tradition of military music at West Point.

With the establishment of the United States Military Academy in 1802 came an increased demand for military music. As the academy grew, it needed fifers, drummers and buglers to drill the new cadets and provide an audible order to their duty day. In 1817 the ensemble was named the "West Point Band," and by this time was performing on a full range of instruments, which included two bassoons, two Royal Kent bugles, a tenor bugle, ten clarinets, three French horns, a serpent (an early bass horn), cymbals, a bass drum, eight flutes, and two trumpets. In 1866 it received the official title of the "United States Military Academy Band."

Today's band consists of four components: the Concert Band, the Hellcats (the drum and bugle field music unit), the Jazz Knights, and the Support Staff. These combine to form the Marching Band. The unit fulfills all of the official musical requirements of the academy, including military and patriotic ceremonies, public concerts, sporting events and radio and television broadcasts, as well as social activities for the Corps of Cadets and the West Point community. The soldier-musicians of this organization are recruited by the Army and selected through a competitive audition process especially for service in the United States Military Academy Band. They are chosen from among a cross-section of the nation's finest music schools and conservatories.

As the senior premier musical representative of the United States Army, the band has appeared at many historical events. It performed at the dedication of the Erie Canal; at the Chicago and New York world's fairs; and for the funerals of Ulysses S. Grant and Franklin D. Roosevelt. In conjunction with the 1952 academy sesquicentennial, the band sought after leading contemporary composers to contribute works evocative of West Point. The resulting

musical gifts from such celebrated musicians as Morton Gould, Darius Milhaud, William Grant Still and Roy Harris soon became a vital part of the international wind band repertoire.

As the Military Academy bicentennial approached, the band again encouraged important American composers to write new works. The band commissioned Kimo Williams to create a piece depicting the famous Buffalo Soldiers, whose distinguished service included West Point. Other recently premiered compositions include James Kessler's *Hudson River Rhapsody* for oboe and band; Samuel Adler's *Dawn to Glory*; and *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* written by Robert Starer for piccolo and band. Daniel Welcher's contribution, *Perpetual Song* is a tribute to J.S. Bach and Dimitri Shostakovich. Eric Ewazen has written, to date, the largest work for the Academy Band and the bicentennial. Ewazen's piece, *Legacy*, is a symphony in three movements and is a tribute to West Point, the United States of America, and all who have served their country. The third movement *...Of Home and Country* was performed at the 54th Midwest Clinic. The band formally led the Military Academy into its third century with a performance featuring this important new music, at Carnegie Hall, on March 15th, 2002.